

FEBRUARY 7, 1974

Herders are turning into sob sisters that'd make the soap operas think they'd found a new rewrite man. Grown hombres get upset over trifling matters. I have a hard enough time dramatizing my own grief without hearing about theirs. Things have got so bad that they even write the Shortgrass Country for sympathy.

Oilmen and doctors don't go around looking for excuses to complain. Healers and fossil fuel miners just take it however it comes. When they feel low, they go buy them another ranch or found a new bank. I wish my colleagues were that tough.

Herders see the bad side of everything. An old boy wrote from New Mexico that the cattle he was shipping were losing \$100 a head. I don't know what he thought I could do about it. Once we could send a suffering compadre a kid goat or a sack of pecans. Nowadays, the eagles eat all the goats and the coons beat the worms and the squirrels to the pecans, so all we could possibly send would be a fat eagle or a dressed coon.

I guess I could do like a trader did during that awful drouth of the '50s. He felt so terrible about hanging with a bunch of boys with a string of lambs that he sent them a sack of dried peaches for Christmas. It wasn't much of a gift, but it was the best he could do.

One hundred dollars a head on a steer isn't really worth writing letters for sympathy. In 18 good years, a smart operator can turn that around into a payout proposition.

Let's say the old boy is in his mid 40s. By the time he's a broken mouth, he ought to have that deal covered and be back working toward the black.

Cow wrecks always look worse the first 10 years after they happen. I don't suppose there's any type of economic disaster that'll heal up in so few turnovers. I like to think of the cow business as something fast, like digging rock holes or sifting the bottom of the ocean.

What is bad is marginal losses. Big wrecks will keep you going at the bank, but those small ones will only give the banker a chance to start backing out.

Some of the most secure years that ranchers ever had were when the banker and the bankee were sleeping in the same bed of thorns. Jugskeepers were sticktights in those times. I can remember lots of dry episodes that were characterized by love affairs between the industry and the jugs that were plenty hot.

I think we could improve ourselves by watching how those supermarket folks face their troubles. All during the past six months of bovine trauma, the grocers have been calm as a sea captain's dreams.

I really admire them. They can face up to the enraged customers and blame the cowboys without changing expressions. You'll never see one of those packaged meat peddlers complaining about high feed prices or death losses. As much as they are attached to the cattle industry, they can bear their pain better than any of us.

I haven't decided how to answer that ailing steer herder. Words of condolence are hard to send when you need them yourself. He must be in an awful jam to write down here for help.